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HIRAM W. JOHNSON

Machine Smasher, Constructive Statesman

PROGRESSIVE CANDIDATE FOR
VICE-PRESIDENT



“We have nominated the only type of man who ever ought to be nominated for the Vice-Presidency; we have nominated a man fit at the moment to be President of the United States.”

—Theodore Roosevelt.

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Hiram W. Johnson, the Fighting Governor of California, Who Has Waged a Long and Winning War Against Political Corruption

In barely two years to have set a new mark, first as a fighting machine smasher, then as a constructive statesman, and finally as an overshadowing national personality—this is the unique record of Hiram W. Johnson, Governor of California and Progressive nominee for Vice-President of the United States.

For forty years prior to Hiram Johnson's now famous crusade, the ostensibly self-governing State of California had actually been ruled by the political bureau of a private corporation, the Southern Pacific Railway Company. This bureau was the originator in the United States of the so-called "system," the partnership between politically-privileged business and commercially-subsidized politics.

Built by the Government, endowed with huge land grants and capitalized by Government guarantees, the Pacific railroads were in politics from the beginning; first to get these privileges, and afterward to escape the obligations that these privileges imposed.

Their example called into being similar machines in other States. Their land lobby, long maintained at Washington, first established land-grabbing on a national scale.

In California, they maintained the whole political organization of the State. Their salaried agents openly sat on the floor of the Legislature, and frankly dictated legislation. They dominated political conventions and controlled nominations, including, in fact, especially judges. The recognized avenue to political preferment was the favor of the railroad company. The accepted sentence of political extinction was its hostility. There were, to be sure, individuals who successfully maintained their independence in public life, and there had been, for three years prior to the crusade of 1910, an organized opposition known as the Lincoln-Roosevelt League, which had achieved partial victory in 1908 and had obtained from the Legislature in 1909 an imperfect direct primary law.

This league, in the Spring of 1910, called on Hiram Johnson to accept its indorsement as candidate for the Republican nomination for Governor. Johnson had already made a brilliant reputation as a lawyer in Sacramento and in San Francisco, and he had attracted State-wide attention by his conduct on the

San Francisco graft prosecutions. Associated with the prosecutions for a short time in the beginning, he had publicly withdrawn from his employment, at the time of the campaign for re-election of the Langdon-Heney administration of the District Attorney's office, in order to enter into the campaign free of the suspicions of personal interest. Afterward, when Francis J. Heney was being worn to the breaking point by the strain of fighting a dozen lawyers at once, each chosen for his talents in a particular sort of legal obstruction, Johnson was repeatedly urged by the League of Justice to take up part of the burden and name his own fee, but he felt himself obligated by this public statement to persist in his refusal. Matt I. Sullivan was making a final appeal and had just received final refusal, when the news came that Heney had been shot down in open court.

"That settles it," said Johnson. "I don't want any fee; I will take the case with you, Sullivan, and we will finish Heney's work for him."

And they did it with such success that Abe Reuf, arch-graftor of California, was convicted and is now in the penitentiary.

The qualities shown in this service, the remarkable campaigning ability developed in the two elections for the rescue of San Francisco from the grafter, and the fact that he was the one man connected with the graft-crusade whose personal popularity even the poisoned press of San Francisco had never been able to affect, marked Hiram Johnson as the one man best equipped for the larger campaign of redeeming the State. But again he was reluctant; while he had always been active in public affairs, Johnson had acquired in his youth an invincible aversion to personal candidacy for office. Possibly the conviction that it was a forlorn hope, in which some one must make the preliminary fight, but in which personality was impossible, was the strongest inducement in overcoming this aversion. At any rate, after a struggle, the dramatic intensity of which will never be forgotten by those who participated in it, he finally consented to "go to the bat." From that moment of final assent there was never any hesitation.

California is a State a thousand miles long. Most of it is inaccessible by railroad—mountainous, with desert coast and interior plain. It is the most varied State topographically in the Union. The mere physical task of preaching a new crusade to such a State seemed almost insuperable. Johnson solved it by a seven months' automobile campaign, in which he travelled 18,000 miles, speaking on an average of five times a day, mostly in the open air, and meeting the people face to face. In literally every hamlet and cross road, as well as in the towns and cities of California, the primary campaign was made on a single issue—the overthrow of the Southern Pacific machine. At first there was little publicity beyond the local meetings, but finally the

whole State was aroused, and even Johnson became convinced, as he put it, that "the revolution was on." From that time on he concluded every speech with the same sentence, the sentence that changed the history of California. It was this: "Without vainglory or boasting, I say to you that I am going to be Governor of California, and when I am Governor, I am going to kick out of this Government William F. Herrin and the Southern Pacific Railroad."

A purely constructive campaign, so far, without a constructive policy in it; but it concentrated a crusade, and demonstrated a remarkable personality. The dominant note of Hiram Johnson is sincerity. He is a remarkably magnetic speaker of the downright fighting type. In the highest places, among the nation's greatest orators, he leaves an impression which stands out permanently in the memory. The same impression he left on the hustings of California—the feeling "This man means it, and can be trusted to do it." It is a quality, not merely of oratory, but of the man.

Harris Weinstock, one of the most eminent citizens of California, says: "I have known Hiram Johnson intimately since he was a baby. I have seen him under every moral test which a man or a boy can face, and I have never known him to fail to rise to the full measure of every test."

This immediately recognized sincerity of character, reflected in speech, made the simple crusade of a single promise the most remarkable political revival ever known in the West. A magazine writer has described Johnson as "a political revivalist;" another writer, that he saw in Johnson's meetings in the California campaign, "a moral fervor, fusing the assemblies into almost a spiritual frenzy, for a second—a mass phenomenon—I have rarely, if ever, witnessed outside of religious meetings."

A "political revivalist" conducting a campaign on the single destructive issue of "kicking out" one man and his henchmen is scarcely the type from which to expect constructive statesmanship. But Governor Johnson's record in this respect has been no less remarkable than his achievement as a campaigner. Johnson was nominated at the primary by a triumphant vote. The Lincoln-Roosevelt League became the regular Republican organization of the State. Its factional platform, a mere declaration of war on the machine, was expanded as a party platform into probably the most comprehensive program of concrete reforms ever embodied in a single State platform. Johnson made his campaign for election still on the "kicking out" issue, but also with the pledge that if a progressive governor and legislature were elected the definite pledges of the platform would be enacted into law. He was elected by the largest majority ever given a candidate for Governor in California, and within four months of the day of his inauguration every pledge of his rad-

ically comprehensive platform was either enacted into law or submitted to the people as a constitutional amendment. The amendments were passed, an extra session of the Legislature enacted the necessary supplementary laws, and within one year of the inauguration every pledge of the platform was actually operative in law. It was the complete governmental transformation in the shortest time ever known in an American State. M. Oster, the French publicist, described it as the only example he knew of in the history of the English-speaking world in which governmental reform was accomplished with what he patriotically described as "French thoroughness."

From the most boss-ridden to the most progressive State in the Union, governmental California was transformed in a single year, and the crusade of California is now being preached to the Nation. The doctrine of California is the aspiration of the Nation. The platform had called for the initiative, referendum and recall, the direct election of Senators, a shorter ballot, the simplification of the primary law, the abolition of the "party circle" on the ballot and the non-partisan nomination of judges, women's suffrage, county home rule, simplified criminal procedure, prison reform, non-partisanship in appointments, business administrative reforms, conservation legislation, the extension of the powers of the railroad commission, a public service commission and a workmen's compensation act.

Surely an ambitious program for a single session of the Legislature less than three months in length. Yet all these things were passed, as well as a considerable amount of social legislation not in the platform, including an eight-hour law for women and a local option law. Theodore Roosevelt referred to it at the time as "the most comprehensive program of constructive legislation ever enacted at a single session of the Legislature of any American State."

The most powerful single force in making this legislative record was Governor Johnson's inaugural address, in which he broke all precedent by agreeing to do as Governor exactly what he had promised to do as candidate. Administratively, the public's faith was also kept. The old machine and its henchmen were ousted, graft was unearthed and eradicated, economy and efficiency secured, the prisons, reformatory and charitable institutions put on a far better basis, and, in short, a new era was established of government for the people, instead of for the politicians.

This is but a skeleton sketch of only two years of Governor Johnson's career, but they are the two years into which the preparation and the qualifications of all the rest have gone. Born in Sacramento, forty-five years ago, Hiram Johnson attended the public schools and the State University, and practiced law with brilliant success, first in Sacramento and then in San Francisco,

He was generally known as the best trial lawyer in California. He lives in a beautiful home on top of Russian Hill in San Francisco, set on the summit of a literal cliff, up which one clammers by zigzag stairways set against the rock. From the windows or from the terraced Italian garden, which Mrs. Johnson with infinite patience has caused to grow on top of that rocky cliff, one looks down on San Francisco Bay and the Golden Gate, and across to Mt. Tamalpais and the shore opposite. There is no finer view in the world. The Johnsons have two vigorous American boys, both of whom are the chums of their parents. It is a pleasanter life than the whirl of polities can offer, and one does not wonder that both the Governor and Mrs. Johnson prefer it.

Success has not turned the head of Governor Johnson. He is unaffectedly democratic, and hates snobbery and show; even his meteoric rise to fame he takes humbly, as a responsibility and an opportunity for service. But a personality so unique cannot be confined. The whole nation now knows of Governor Johnson, representatives of every State have seen and have heard him at the National Convention this Summer, and tested his mettle. The whole nation will hear him soon and will doubtless come as much under the spell of his winning personality as California has. And the nation will approve the unanimous judgment of the convention—that Hiram W. Johnson is the one man in all America best fitted to preach, with Theodore Roosevelt, the new doctrine of popular rule.

Perhaps the finest tribute to Governor Johnson that has appeared was in the speech of acceptance of Theodore Roosevelt when he and Johnson faced the cheering thousands at the Chicago Convention. The moment after their nomination Colonel Roosevelt said:

“I have a peculiar feeling toward Governor Johnson. Nearly two years ago after the election of 1910 when what I had striven to accomplish in New York had come to nothing, and when my friends the enemy exulted—possibly prematurely—over what had befallen me, Governor Johnson, in the flush of his own triumph, having just won out, wrote me a letter, which I shall hand on to my children, and children’s children because of what the letter contains, and because of the man who wrote it; a letter of trust and belief, a letter of ardent championship from the soldier who was at that moment victorious, toward his comrade who at that moment had been struck down: In Governor Johnson we have a man whose every word is made good by the deeds that he has done. A man, who as the head of a great State has practically applied in that State for the benefit of the people of that State the principles which we intend to apply throughout the Union as a whole. We have nominated the only type of man who ever ought to be nominated for the Vice-Presidency; we have nominated a man fit at the moment to be President of the United States.”

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